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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

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SUBJECT: MAYOR OF ARIEL: FORGET LAND FOR PEACE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Mayor of the Ariel settlement Ron Nachman told PolOff during a lengthy August 29 meeting that the USG pursuit of land for peace is "a big mistake" and proposed splitting the West Bank between Israel and Jordan. For thirty years, Nachman has been the Mayor of Ariel, which is home to 18,000 Israeli settlers and which extends 22 km into the West Bank. He said he is considering a return to national Israeli politics (he was once in the Israeli Knesset). END SUMMARY.

Rejecting Land for Peace  
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¶2. (C) Ron Nachman is the founder of and only mayor in the history of Ariel, which is the fourth largest West Bank settlement with 18,000 residents (half from the former Soviet Union). In a three-hour August 29 meeting with PolOff, he focused almost exclusively on national and Arab-Israeli issues and took time for a call from Israeli MoD Barak. He said "land for peace" is a big mistake and that by pursuing this policy, the USG is "doing the bidding" of the Arabs, who "don't know democracy." Nachman rejected Oslo and said "we gave land and got suicide bombers in return." He added "Even if I leave the West Bank tomorrow with all the rest of the settlers, terror will remain." Nachman blamed the Palestinians for not establishing their state in 1947 and said a state needs three elements: land, people, and international recognition. He assessed that Madrid gave the recognition, and Oslo gave the land, and said Israel had created a partner in the Palestinians when Egypt and Jordan had failed to do so.

Carving up the West Bank and Gaza  
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¶3. (C) Nachman proposed that the solution to the "Palestinian problem" is for Arab countries to give Egypt USD 15 billion over ten years to annex Gaza and develop Northern Sinai and Rafah into industrialized zones on the Mediterranean. In the West Bank, he said, the Arabs should provide USD 20 billion over ten years to develop its industry and economy, and Israel and Jordan should annex the territory like "interlocked fingers".

¶4. (C) Nachman said that Ariel has a generally aging population and is unlikely to grow any larger, especially since the separation barrier already extends 22 km into the West Bank to contain the settlement, and barrier construction is complete in the immediate area. Comment: Nachman was notably one of the few settlement Mayors whom Post has recently met who did not press the need to expand his settlement to accommodate natural growth. End Comment.

Neighboring Arab Towns

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15. (C) Nachman claimed that Ariel has a good relationship with neighboring Palestinian towns and said he "supplies" water, electricity, and emergency medical services to nearby Salfit. He said some 2000 Arabs work in Ariel, and he wants to be a "spearhead" for cooperation with northern West Bank towns on hospitals, sewage systems, industry, research and development, and casinos.

Sixth Term Ending: National Politics Next?  
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16. (C) After thirty years leading Ariel, Mayor Nachman is a leading figure of the settler movement. His sixth term ends in 2008, and he told PolOff that he is actively considering a return to national politics. He was previously a Likud member of Knesset. Nachman has reportedly thus far refused offers to do so, including at the request of former PM Sharon, but he told PolOff, he now thinks that Israel most needs real leadership, and he indicated that he thinks he can provide it.

WALLES